

**RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
SCHOOL PERFORMANCE CATEGORIES**

**CRANSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
THURSDAY, APRIL 11, 2002**

Attending from Cranston: Catherine Ciarlo, Superintendent of Schools, James Cofone, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Carol C. Bissanti, Executive Director, Education Programs & Grants, Robert Scaffardi, Director of Literacy & Title I, Jack Blackburn, Coordinator/Director of Pupil Personnel Services, Norman Laliberte, Coordinator/Director, General Education, Millie D'Aguanno, Professional Development Institute Coordinator, Jean Campbell, Principal, Cranston Area Career and Technical Center, Donald W. Frederick, Principal, Cranston High School East, Jean Manocchia, SITeam Chair, Cranston High School East, Jeanine Nota, Cranston High School East, Edmond Lemoi, Principal, Cranston High School West, Jean Larkin, Guidance, Cranston High School West, Michael O'Rourke, Principal, Bain Middle School, Marlene Gamba, Principal, Edgewood Highland, Elizabeth Ruest, Grade 3 Teacher, Edgewood Highland, Michael Lazzarreschi, Principal, Gladstone Street School, Marlene Greene, Literacy, Gladstone Street School. (Letter of support from Jacqueline A White - Chair, Cranston School Committee.)

RIDE Staff: Todd Flaherty, Deputy Commissioner, Diane Schaefer, Janet Carroll, Faith Fogle, Cathy Dumsar, Office of Instruction, Thomas DiPaola, Office of Special Needs, Vanessa Cooley, Office of Research, High School Reform and Adult Education, Linda Nightingale Greenwood, Office of Integrated Social Services, Susan Rotblat-Walker, Office of School Improvement and Accountability, and Lita Orefice, Office of Finance and Accounting.

RIDE Welcome and Meeting Orientation

- Deputy Commissioner Todd Flaherty welcomed the group and gave an overview of the process and objectives of the meeting including:
- Establishing of agreements on "next steps" as outlined in the School Performance Category Technical Assistance Bulletin with regard to required District/school/RIDE actions;
- Addressing district capacity for implementing activities/next steps (to be outlined in the May 1st CRP, Article 31 - Strategic Planning document for submittal to RIDE which also needs to be approved publicly in a Cranston School Committee meeting;
- Addressing RIDE capacity to support, if applicable; and

- Generating a meeting report which needs to be made "public" at the district's school committee meeting.

District/School Response:

Representatives from Cranston were given the opportunity to respond to the performance designations for Cranston High School East, Cranston High School West, Hugh B. Bain Middle School, Edgewood Highland (Elementary) School and Gladstone Street (Elementary) School. Superintendent Ciarlo began by expressing disappointment that Cranston School Committee Chair Jackie White's illness would prevent her from attending this meeting, and commending Chairwoman White's leadership and the School Committee's ongoing support *vis a vis* the Cranston school district. Continuing the district overview, Programs & Grants Manager Carol Bissanti underscored Cranston's strong focus on teaching and learning and its organizational structure for school improvement and success. She referenced the May 25, 2001, comprehensive district review held at Gladstone Street School in which Deputy Commissioner Flaherty participated. Bissanti described district support systems including the Central Office Leadership Team that meets monthly to analyze student testing data and to provide a mechanism for educational research for identifying proven strategies for instructional use. A Joint Articulation Committee, Grades K-12, designs activities around feeder school patterns.

Describing the Cranston school district as being at a crossroads in terms of implementing programs, Bissanti referenced Cranston's final stage of aligning curriculum with state and national standards, the simultaneous 5-year review of math and English/language arts curriculum, the IREAD program's fall (pre-) and May (post-) testing of all Edgewood Highlands and Gladstone Street Kindergarten and Grade 1 students, and the professional development and extended year/summer school program that are provided by the IREAD program. At the elementary level, a key initiative underway in improving math curriculum and instruction is the piloting in Grades 3-5 of standards-based/inquiry approach materials as the prerequisite to selecting a new math text and program. At the secondary level, Bob Scaffardi oversees course offerings and high school requirements, with particular emphasis on a comprehensive review of the math curriculum.

A strong developmental guidance focus is reflected in Student Planning Centers that have been set up not only at Bain Middle School and Cranston High School East but also at Gladstone Street School. It is at these Centers which are each staffed by a teacher and a social worker that student behavioral problems can be dealt with swiftly and appropriately on the spot. Furthermore, in order to address critical school culture issues, a full Kindergarten-Grade12 developmental guidance program is slated for implementation next year. The recent extension of Gladstone Street School's successful COZ Program to Edgewood Highland and

Norwood Avenue Schools reinforces the essential health link to learning via the integrated social services provided by the COZ model. Significant support for students transitioning from the pre-kindergarten level at four (4) schools including Gladstone and Edgewood Highlands is provided by the Head Start Program based at Norwood Avenue. A one-year earmarked 21st Century Schools grant currently serves as the impetus for school improvement at Bain Middle School.

A vast array of professional development activity is orchestrated across the district via several networks, including the I.F.L. (Institute for Learning) in which the widespread participation of administrators will soon extend to department chairs and instructional supervisors in charge of content areas and the arts. Central Office and building leaders collaborating in afternoon study groups have coalesced into a community of learners; this collaboration in turn has impacted low performing schools in the district. In conjunction with the A.F.T., the district's Professional Development Institute under Millie D'Aguanno is offering teachers credit courses for recertification. This PD Institute also sponsors activities that encourage content area teachers to utilize cross-curricular approaches in which concepts in English/language arts, math and health are embedded in the arts, science, and social studies instruction.

Relative to professional development, Deputy Commissioner Flaherty noted here that RIDE is asking districts to reanalyze professional development for teachers of low performing schools to ensure that the focus is on instituting instruction that is truly standards-based. Drawing upon the analogy of the problem posed when one has to move suddenly into a smaller house, Superintendent Ciarlo acknowledged the monumental challenge Cranston currently faces in having to prioritize everything to be done in the educational arena. Deputy Commissioner Flaherty then asked how IASA can help move reform initiatives forward, specifically referring to the use of federal Title 2 funds and to reduction in class size, particularly in ESL and elementary populations. In response to Superintendent Ciarlo's request to be notified if more financial relief becomes available from the state, e.g., assistance for the certified pension contribution, RIDE Finance Officer Lita Orefice responded that unfortunately any fiscal increase in this category would not have a positive impact on Cranston because its budget is level-funded.

Programmatic/Instructional Actions:

In providing evidence of its efforts to address the issues regarding its low performing schools, the district is making headway in improving math instruction at the elementary level by piloting the standards-based materials in Grades 3-5 that were referred to above; at the secondary level a comprehensive review of the math curriculum is underway also. Under IASA it is anticipated that Edgewood Highland, a Title I school, as is Gladstone Street School, will acquire

the same Title I Schoolwide Project (SWP) status that Gladstone Street currently holds. It is also expected that Bain Middle School will become a Title I school.

Cranston High School East

Principal Don Frederick outlined East's recent successes and challenges in facing rapidly changing demographics (including a student mobility increase from 6% to 20% over three years, as per INFOWORKS), high staff turnover (45 new faculty members within the past three years), and designation as a low performing school. East is improving overall in math student achievement, as demonstrated by the fact that targets were met in 4 out of 6 mathematics subtests on the New Standards Reference Exam. However, 50% of East students scored in the lowest performance category in all math subtests. In English language arts, East met 5 of 10 targets with reading analysis and interpretation showing substantial improvement. One of the most important school initiatives designed to improve math and ELA student performance at East is its study skills program, which was begun four (4) years ago. Study hall was eliminated to allow all 9th graders to meet twice a week to focus on reading analysis high order thinking skills, and health assessment preparation via strategies such as writing health essays. Tenth graders in this study skills program participate in statewide test preparation strategies that complement their regular math and ELA instruction. In response to Deputy Commissioner Flaherty's question regarding evaluation of this program and student progress, Principal Frederick said that the students maintain individual comprehensive portfolios. When RIDE Office of Instruction Director Diane Schaefer raised the point that New Standards testing is looking at an integrated algebra-geometry instructional approach, Superintendent Ciarlo requested assistance in identifying such programs. Students are to be offered Algebra 2 by the 10th grade.

In addressing performance implications for ESL and Special Education students at East, Principal Frederick noted East's large ESL population and the challenge of providing consistent instruction for the large January influx of students from South America who then disappear in May. Principal Frederick registered frustration with RIDE's unrealistic expectations regarding special education student accommodations, singling out the school's 25 zeroes received for non-test takers in spite of 6 doctors' notes on file. East has three (3) inclusion teams which coordinate instruction in social studies, science, math and graphic arts. Deputy Commissioner Flaherty acknowledged the need for RIDE to address the significant disruption caused by the state's annual March testing window.

East's faculty is making progress towards adopting standards-based instruction, a fact supported by the large number of teachers who signed up to take Course One, a recommendation of East's January 2001 SALT Report. This document also provided evidence of East's efforts to focus on personalization as a means to improve student performance and morale within a large high school. Referring to the SALT Report's description of East as a "safe, caring, nurturing school,"

Principal Frederick attributed East's climate of respect and trust to a sustained process that included offering students several opportunities to share and discuss the SALT Report findings. This process also entailed the development of a new mission statement for the school in conjunction with a comprehensive school-wide student-parent survey in which thirty (30) expectations were identified, new rubrics developed for each expectation, followed by reclassification into academic, civic and social categories. Individual departments have taken responsibility for specific categories. A typical reflection of the harmonious atmosphere that prevails within the East community is its low incidence of student fights in a school year (fewer than 7 fights among 1600 students).

Hugh B. Bain Middle School

Principal Michael O'Rourke created a portrait of Bain last year as a school with 710 students, of which 31% were receiving special education services, 5% ESL, 40% free/reduced lunch, and a high level of student suspensions among too many unmotivated, disengaged students. To address the issue of school climate, Bain patterned its Project Respect for Bain 6th and 7th graders after Cranston East's program, collaborating with Cranston East High School students. Principal O'Rourke instituted monthly meetings at which he made presentations; students now host these meetings. Bain also adopted the Student Planning Center model from Gladstone Street, its biggest feeder school, to assist 10-15 students who are failing at mid-year. The increasingly ineffective Saturday detention program was modified; Friday after school appears to serve as a more powerful deterrent to disruptive behavior. To improve attendance, Truancy Court has been established at Bain Middle School. To assist special needs students, Bain has adopted use of TS (Teacher Support) Teams and has specifically focused on professional development activity around a co-teaching and inclusion model. In the absence of test accommodations for test takers with IQs in the 60s, Principal O'Rourke asked for assistance for these students. A family outreach approach, using computers to communicate with non-English speaking families, is being piloted at Bain. The 21st Century Grant Program serves as a school improvement catalyst in addition to striving to provide a seamless in-school and after-school day for students. Additional student support is provided through the Home Work Club and a collaborative effort between the Youth Center, the YMCA next door and Johnson & Wales University.

In the teaching and learning areas, Bain exhibited initiative in volunteering for its SALT visit to be moved up from its scheduled date to February 1, 2001. Significant attention and action planning has been devoted to implementing recommendations from this SALT report. An external facilitator was tapped to identify three (3) main categories, namely:

- Inclusion vis a vis special education issues;
- Reading, writing and problem solving; and

➤ Motivating disengaged students

In a brief dialogue between Deputy Commissioner Flaherty and Principal O'Rourke regarding Bain's test results indicating that 42% of its students performed at the lowest level of achievement over a three year period, Principal O'Rourke acknowledged the challenge of establishing a truly effective leadership model in which significant responsibility beyond that of the principal is assumed by the School Improvement Team (SIT) and each department chairperson. The intent to establish Bain as a Title I school as a means to focus on its teaching and learning was again stated by Grants Coordinator, Carol Bissanti. Superintendent Ciarlo emphasized the acute need to offer new and varied teaching methodologies as well as effective alternative programs to Bain's disengaged students once the school succeeds in getting these students to school.

Cranston West High School and Cranston Area Career and Technical Center

Principal Edmond Lemoi began his presentation on Cranston West by describing the positive contributions and intense involvement of West's School Improvement Team of sixty-five (65) parents, students and staff. He enumerated the numerous steps taken to improve West's overall testing environment and to impress upon both students and their parents the significance of the state testing results, including: devoting a full issue of the school newspaper to the topic; sending home a letter on state assessment; meeting with every 11th grade English class; hosting a 9th grade pizza party, a 10th grade beach party; an 11th grade Prom Raffle and providing breakfast for all students taking the tests.

Principal Lemoi noted that administrators and faculty were trained at multiple sessions conducted by Dr. Robert Felner of the University of Rhode Island National Center on Public Policy and Social Policy, that Ken Fish of the RI Department of Education's Office of School Improvement spoke at School Report Night, and that Faith Fogle of the Department of Education facilitated a session on interpretation of SALT data for all School Improvement Team members. Principal Lemoi delineated between short-term remediation efforts by the School Improvement Team to address the low numbers of math/ELA targets hit (only 4 out of 16) over a three-year period versus long-term systemic efforts. The former includes adaptation of Cranston East's Study Skills Program; the latter includes a dramatic 50% reduction in suspensions at Cranston West over a three year period; the reduction in the school's dropout rate from 3.5% in 1999 to 2.1% in 2001, and a steady increase in the daily attendance rate.

Forty (40) students identified as at risk participate in a school-within-a-school program for which a modified block schedule and in-house suspension system have been adopted. Enhancing the degree of personalization within West's student body of over 1300 students is an ongoing challenge taken increasingly seriously by all concerned. To improve school climate at Cranston West, Project

RESPECT was adopted from Cranston East, whose students trained the West students, who in turn transferred their learning by training the Western Hills students. Parents are invited to the school twice before their children matriculate; incoming 9th grade students visit three (3) times.

Other efforts to address the schools performance category designation center around school-based and Article 31 supported professional development activity provided at Alton Jones/URI and through Cranston's Professional Development Institute (PDI). Such activity has focused upon the systematic examination of student work, a major component of standards-based instruction when all faculty participate in the process. Preparation for the West's January 2003 SALT visit is underway with the school self-study, as is a two-year study to address graduation requirements. Two (2) and five (5) year NEASC reports have been completed. An overall analysis of West's test data reveals that 30% of its students nearly met the standards. Principal Lemoi pointed out that without the zeroes assigned for the non-test takers, West would be a moderately performing school. He concluded with the announcement that West's motto of "West is Best" is in the process of making way for a new motto, namely "Cranston West: The Place that treats others the way we would like to be treated."

The Cranston Career and Technical Center's Principal Jean Campbell highlighted the school's goal of supporting its students in reading in content areas and math problem-solving, as well as identifying 28% of its 500+ students enrollment as special needs. She praised the school's "small learning community of great teachers," a Tech Center that participates in all West High School activities, a school in which ELA and math classrooms are becoming more performance-based and are increasingly using authentic assessments for students. Progress is being made in the area of personalization. Principal Campbell identified the need for a certain group of students to be challenged to take higher math courses; otherwise these students leave school without having taken Algebra 1. Deputy Commissioner Flaherty noted that this phenomenon would cease if the Rhode Island Board of Regents passes a Core Curriculum. Principals Campbell and Lemoi expressed frustration with the fact that 129 students attend Cranston's Career and Technical Center from other Rhode Island school districts, but that it is West that is penalized for their low test scores. Also expressed was the feeling that although the Career and Technical Center staff and students have, at times, been viewed as 2nd class citizens, Tech teachers have embraced standards-based instruction. Nevertheless, positive trends are the upcoming visits by Providence Teachers for 200 hours of classroom observation and the belief that Tech students are acquiring an identity of being fully integrated into the arts and sciences.

A final problem, i.e., that Career and Technical students are identified as West students via a Perkins accountability system, was identified by Assistant Superintendent James Cofone.

Gladstone Street School

Principal Michael Lazzarreschi's description of Gladstone Street's positive, welcoming school climate mirrored the portrait painted of the school's atmosphere in Gladstone's March 1, 2002 SALT Report.

A school whose student enrollment is rapidly increasing (100 new students in the past year) and whose percentage of students receiving free/reduced lunch is 75%, Gladstone is the district's highest-ranking Title I school. In the four years since he became principal, Lazzarreschi noted that the \$280,000.00 received annually in Title I funds has been concentrated on language arts. In addition, a packed pre-school and early intervention program, staffing (including four well-trained and respected reading specialists who work directly in classrooms--rather than in pull-out mode), focused articulation between grades K-2 teachers, who utilize a half-day planning time on a monthly basis, adoption and focused professional development through PDI of a rubric in Grade 3 all contribute to an overall improvement in reading performance. Consistently increasing emphasis on writing at all grades in all content areas, use of the four block instruction model writing program and IREAD training for all resource/special education staff have resulted in improved student performance in writing, e.g., a 28% improvement (a change from 53% to 25%) in students scoring in the lowest performing category of the Writing Effectiveness subtest and improvement in hitting Rhode Island Writing Test targets (see Data Analysis attachment).

Also contributing to improved performance is significant parent involvement, a cornerstone of Gladstone Street School as reflected in its highly praised Child Opportunity Zone (COZ) and Head Start programs. Report cards issued in multiple languages, the COZ-sponsored school newsletter and the breakfasts for parents of Grade 1 students are examples of Gladstone's integrated social services, vehicles that link parents to the Gladstone Street School community's educational, health and social objectives.

Next year, Gladstone's academic and professional development focus will shift from writing to math, for which additional resources are needed. When Deputy Commissioner Flaherty observed that no targets were met for any performance levels in math; that more than 60% of Gladstone's students performed at the lowest levels on the math concepts subtest and over 80% of its students performed at the lowest levels in math problem-solving; Principal Lazzarreschi acknowledged such results as the rationale for shifting the school's academic and professional development emphasis. Another important professional development focus should be the school's large English as a second language (ESL) population. As the SALT Report noted, teachers are challenged to provide

appropriate levels of instruction for the many levels of skills represented by the large numbers of ESL students in most classes.

Edgewood Highland Elementary School

Principal Marlene Gamba, formerly a reading consultant, assumed her position in September 2001. She described Edgewood Highland's sixteen (16) classrooms as unique in that ten (10) are classified as special needs, e.g., ESL, and three (3) classes have Developmental Learning Programs (DLPs), which bring students into the school for early intervention. Principal Gamba detailed efforts to respond to October 2002 SALT Report recommendations with the assistance of Deb Anderson, a district administrator who oversees the district/school-wide participation and response within the SALT cycle. Goals were established to improve language arts instruction and to ensure that a balanced literacy program with basal, instructional methods and assessments appropriate to the school's diverse population are in place. Two (2) full-time reading consultants were sought along with participation in the PALS and IREAD programs. Also needed are school-wide writing and an organized word study program accompanied by related professional development activity, particularly tailored to meet the diverse language needs of the ESL students. While these students can write effectively, they need to hear language spoken correctly. Recently, the Right Time for Kids reading program was introduced. ESL-trained reading consultant, Elizabeth Ruest works with the faculty as a Grade 3 Teacher. A goal of mainstreaming Grade 4 and 5 students in regular Grades 4 and 5 classrooms was established.

The school faces challenges posed by a high mobility rate (increased by its proximity to the Providence school line) and the number of drug-addicted parents. To address these challenges, the school has hired a guidance counselor two and a half (2½) days per week and established a Homework Club, an after school program and a universal free breakfast program. There is a strong need for a two-session kindergarten so that more students can be mainstreamed at this level. As the school's data analysis (see attached) indicates, there is a great need for coordinated professional development focused upon the student performance, standards-based instruction and diverse learning needs. As noted above, Edgewood Highland will become a Title I School-wide Project (SWP) and its faculty is seeking involvement in the IFL (Institute for Learning).

RIDE/Cranston Agreements

Note: While it was intended that the changes/improvements discussed were to be incorporated in the district's strategic plan, the time frame in which this report is issued may preclude such from occurring to the degree anticipated. In order that participants in the April 11, 2002 meeting "capture" proposed changes, such changes can be submitted in addition to the May submission if necessary.

These changes include:

- Edgewood Highland will become a Title I School-wide Project (SWP) school and follow through with the newly identified action planning steps in the school improvement plan.
- Bain Middle School will become a Title I school and follow through with the newly identified action planning steps in the school improvement plan.
- Cranston (district and schools) will provide ongoing targeted and coordinated school-site and district-coordinated professional development activity that promotes standards-based instruction and the alignment of curriculum with instruction and assessment.
- Cranston East and Cranston West High Schools and Bain Middle School should aggressively expand their efforts to improve school culture programs e.g., advisor-advisee system, that enhance the degree of personalization within the school community.
- These three (3) secondary level schools (see above) will continue to encourage all staff, including administrators, guidance and, to participate in professional development and other activities which improve intra-school collaboration and communication that result in appropriate student academic program placement and adequate classroom and emotional support, particularly for new students transitioning into the school and at-risk and special needs students.
- Cranston Area Career and Technical Center will continue to improve its efforts to build a curriculum which reflects adequate academic rigor for all students.
- Cranston (district and schools) will continue to build upon extensive data analysis effort to monitor student progress at all levels of student achievement.
- Cranston East and Cranston West High Schools will finalize a "Common Core" of academic expectations for their students which will also apply to students in the Career Tech. This Common Core of learning will be standards-based and will reflect high expectations for all students in both math and English language arts.
- Cranston (district) will identify actions steps to assist in the transition of students from the middle schools to the high schools.
- Cranston's district strategic plan and school level improvement plans will be modified to use "quantifiable" objectives in terms of student

achievement results (i.e. the number of students proficient in grade 4-8-10 will increase by X percent per year (OR) by the year 2005 Y percent of all grade 8 students will be proficient in basic reading skills.)

Potential RIDE Support for Cranston

- RIDE will assist Cranston's identified elementary schools to obtain continued funding in order to extend the IREAD program into Grade 2 pending availability of funds.
- RIDE will offer assistance to continue the one-year earmarked 21st Century Grant at Bain Middle School that is critical to its school improvement efforts and to continuing the after school program that is the key to providing a "seamless day" for at-risk students.
- The Rhode Island Department of Education will assist the district in obtaining new funding to continue the work begun under a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant which has moved from middle level (at Bain as focal school) to high school to the elementary level.
- The Rhode Island Department of Education will attempt assisting Cranston in obtaining necessary resources to provide the professional development necessary to ensure that all school staff participate in activities that increase their knowledge of and ability to implement standards-based instruction, not only in math and English language arts, but also in content areas.
- RIDE will continue intensive support to Cranston (district) in "sorting out" the issues of the city's financial crisis.